

# Black Wattle

## *Acacia melanoxylon*

**NAMING:** Greek *akakia* - a sharp point, Greek *melās*, means dark, xylo - wood

**DISTRIBUTION:** *Acacia melanoxylon* in S.A. are naturally found only in the high rainfall (500 to 1000mm) parts of the Northern and Southern Lofty, and South-Eastern regions. They also grow in small local areas of the Flinders Ranges.

**HABITAT:** They are found in woodland or open forests and prefer cool moist valleys and flats. They grow in a variety of soils and being legumes, fix nitrogen in their roots.

### DESCRIPTION:

Black wattles trees are able to grow up to 20 m high, with straight trunks and dense, pyramidal to cylindrical crowns, sometimes with heavy spreading branches. They develop a bole of about 150 cm in diameter at the base of their trunks. The **bark** on older trunks is dark greyish-black in colour, deeply fissured and somewhat scaly. Younger branches are ribbed, angular, or flattened towards their tips and are greenish. The **branchlets** are mostly hairless but the stems of younger plants are sometimes hairy. They can live up to 50 years.



The pale yellow, cream or whitish coloured **flower** balls are fluffy due to the presence of numerous stamens. They are densely arranged into small, rounded clusters



(5-10 mm across), each containing 30-56 flowers. These flower-balls are on stalks usually in groups of 4 to 8 along the branches. In their natural area they bloom between July and December but can bloom throughout the year.

The **fruits** are long and somewhat flattened **pods** (4-15 cm long and 3.5-8 mm wide) that are strongly curved, twisted or coiled. These pods are mostly hairless. They are green and leathery when young but turn brown or reddish-brown and become woodier as they mature. Each pod contains several very distinctive seeds, and once the seeds are released, they become twisted and contorted. The seeds are normally oval (3-5 mm long and 1.7-3 mm wide), glossy and black. They are almost covered by a large pink, pinkish-red or dark red folded fleshy structure.

Like most Acacias, they have **phyllodes** rather than true leaves. Phyllodes are swollen stems and act as leaves in many wattles. On young plants, partially formed phyllodes can be seen with tips of compound normal leaves. As the seedling grows, these leaves eventually vanish altogether. However, remnant leaves can occasionally be seen on the tips of the phyllodes of older plants. The phyllodes are dark green to greyish-green. They are 4-16 cm long and 6-30 mm wide and vary being straight or slightly curved. They are glossy, dark to silvery green and have a small gland on their edge just above the base.

### TRADITIONAL USES:

Wood and fibre were used for fishing lines, spear throwers, shields and throwing sticks. The bark infusion was used as an analgesic for rheumatic joints and the seed were ground and eaten.

### INTERESTING FACTS:

The wood is dense and has many uses including wood panels, furniture, fine cabinetry, tools, boats, inlaid boxes and wooden kegs. Plain and figured Australian blackwood is used in musical instrument making guitars, drums, Hawaiian ukuleles, violin bows and organ pipes. It is approximately the same quality as walnut and is well-suited for shaping with steam.